

VEIL IN ISLAM: AN ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT QURANIC VERSES

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ABSTRACT

This research paper analyses the conditions and practices of veil in Islam in accordance with the verses of Quran that deal with this aspect. The main purpose of this research is to understand the concept of wearing veil and to analyze the sociocultural significance of veil as enshrined in the Holy book of Islam. The paper provides a brief overview regarding importance of modesty in Islam and then links it to the dress code it has prescribed for its followers. We have collated the verses of Quran that deal with the topic of veiling and provided a brief explanation for them. The study also examines the common use of word hijab and if it is used in Quran in the same meaning as what common masses understand. As a result of study, the three key terms in relation to dressing for women, as used in the Quran, have been identified. These three terms, however, are not the only three types or items of dressing from the Islamic perspective. There are some additional words used in the noble ahadith of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ which are not covered in this article, as its scope is restricted to the Quranic verses. The verses support the arguments in the favor of purdah or the veil for women. This is in opposition to the claims of some modernists who claim that the Quran does not require women for veil themselves or do purdah. It is argued in the paper that there are lot of misperceptions about the veil in the Western countries which directly or indirectly affect the image of Muslim communities abroad. It is therefore important to clarify the role of veiling and its purpose from the Islamic point of view.

KEYWORDS: Holy Quran, Veil, modesty of women, Society.

INTRODUCTION:

Islam prescribes its followers a dress code and a code of conduct with opposite gender. Purpose of this practice is to save modesty and chastity of women in society. This is to be understood, however, that this is not required to segregate or alienate them from the rest of society, but to protect them. Throughout the Islamic history, women have participated in economic, socio-cultural and political activities. Even evidences of participation of beloved wife of Holy Prophet ﷺ Bibi Aisha (R.A.) in war are in documented in the history. Similarly, we know that Khadija (R.A.) used to conduct the trading activities. It is also reported from the hadith the women companions used to go out in the battles and attend the religious services and gathering. The condition set forth for them to do so was to enhance their modesty by using

the outer garment called Jilbab (as explained later on in this article). The following narration explains this aspect.

عَنْ حَفْصَةَ. قَالَتْ كُنَّا مَعَ عَوَاتِقَنَا أَنْ يَخْرُجْنَ. فَقَدِمَتِ امْرَأَةٌ فَتَزَلَّتْ قَصْرَ بَنِي خَلْفٍ. فَخَذَّتْ أَنْ أُخْتَهَا كَانَتْ تَحْتَ رَجُلٍ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَدْ غَزَا مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ثِنْتَيْ عَشْرَةَ غَزْوَةً. وَكَانَتْ أُخْتِي مَعَهُ فِي سِتِّ غَزَوَاتٍ. قَالَتْ كُنَّا نُدَاوِي الْكَلْمَى وَنَقُومُ عَلَى الْمَرْضَى. فَسَأَلْتُ أُخْتِي رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَتْ هَلْ عَلَى إِحْدَانَا بَأْسٌ إِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهَا جِلْبَابٌ أَنْ لَا تَخْرُجَ قَالَ "لَيْسَ بِهَا صَاحِبَتُهَا مِنْ جِلْبَابِهَا. وَلْتَشْهَدْ الْحَيَّزِ. وَدَعْوَةَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ". فَلَمَّا قَدِمْتُ أُمُّ عَطِيَّةَ. رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا. سَأَلَتْهَا أَوْ قَالَتْ سَأَلَتْهَا. فَقَالَتْ وَكَانَتْ لَا تَذْكُرُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِلَّا قَالَتْ بَأْسٌ. فَقُلْنَا أَسْمِعِي رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ كَذَا وَكَذَا قَالَتْ نَعَمْ بَأْسٌ. فَقَالَ "لَتَخْرُجَ الْعَوَاتِقُ ذَوَاتُ الْخُدُورِ. أَوِ الْعَوَاتِقُ ذَوَاتُ الْخُدُورِ. وَالْحَيْضُ. فَيَشْهَدْنَ الْحَيَّزِ. وَدَعْوَةَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ. وَيَعْتَزِلُ الْحَيْضُ الْمُبْصِلَى". فَقَالَتْ أَوَلَيْسَ تَشْهَدُ غَرْفَةً. وَتَشْهَدُ كَذَا وَتَشْهَدُ كَذَا

Narrated Hafsa: (On 'Id) We used to forbid our virgins to go out (for 'Id prayer). A lady came and stayed at the Palace of Bani Khalaf. She mentioned that her sister was married to one of the companions of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) who participated in twelve Ghazawats along with Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) and her sister was with him in six of them. She said, "We used to dress the wounded and look after the patients." She (her sister) asked Allah's Messenger (ﷺ), "Is there any harm for a woman to stay at home if she doesn't have a veil?" He said, "She should cover herself with the veil of her companion and she should take part in the good deeds and in the religious gatherings of the believers." When Um 'Atiyya came, I asked her. "Did you hear anything about that?" Um 'Atiyya said, "Bi Abi" and she never mentioned the name of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) without saying "Bi Abi" (i.e. 'Let my father be sacrificed for you'). We asked her, "Have you heard Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) saying so and so (about women)?" She replied in the affirmative and said, "Let my father be sacrificed for him. He told us that unmarried mature virgins who stay often screened or unmarried young virgins and mature girls who stay often screened should come out and take part in the good deeds and in the religious gatherings of the believers. But the menstruating women should keep away from the Musalla (praying place)." I asked her, "The menstruating women?" She replied, "Don't they present themselves at 'Arafat and at such and such places?" (Sahih al-Bukhari 1652)

Moreover, a very high number of the hadith narrators are women and many of the eminent mohaditheen remained their students. This shows that Islam does not put restrictions on women to go out and participate in socio-cultural life of society but prescribes a dress code to women to be saved from any kind of harassment. This research paper is aimed to analyze meaning and obligation of veil system in Islam. In this analysis, the verses about veil from the Holy Quran are quoted with an explanation of the specific words used for the women clothing. References of some Hadiths are also given to show clear picture of veil culture in Islam.

SUMMARY OF LITERATURE:

In the western world, especially among feminist theorists, veil is considered to be an oppression against women. They are of the view that veil is used to separate women from socio-economic activities.

However, the Muslims women who choose to veil themselves, do so out of their own choice and because of their religious commitment. In many cultures, it is a cultural norm too. This also includes some non-Muslim cultures where women practice to cover their heads or veil based on a cultural or social background. Those who observe veil consider it symbol of honor (Diffendal, 2006). Literature reveals that Veiling has a long history in European, Asian, and African societies. The practice has also been prominent in religions other Islam including Judaism, Christianity, and others. There are plenty of references about the veiling in the bible (for example, Isaiah 3:22, Isaiah 25:7, Isa. 28:20, Exodus 34:33, 35, Genesis 24:65 etc.). The practice of veiling is especially associated with women and sacred objects, though in some cultures it is men rather than women who are expected to wear a veil. Besides its enduring religious significance, veiling continues to play a role in some modern secular contexts too and is usually consider a part of the wedding customs.

In the Holy book of Islam and ahadith narrated by the companions, it is found that in Islam dress code for women as well as men is described and discussed in detail. Hijab or veil is made obligatory on Muslim woman for physical segregation of Muslim women and men with main purpose being to save the modesty and chastity of woman. Muslim women need to cover her body from head to foot (Aziz, 2010).

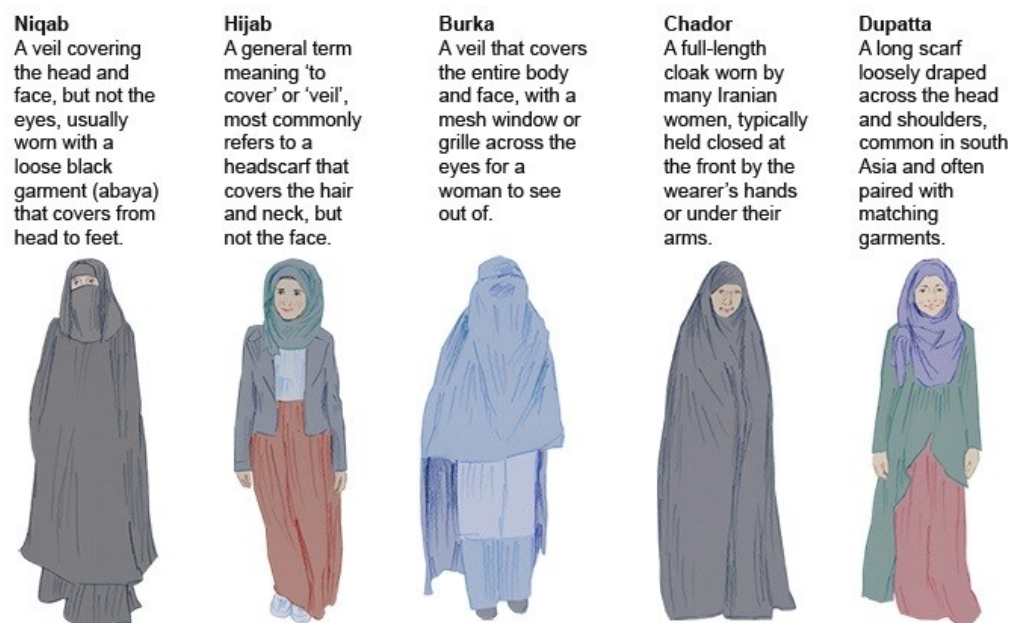


Figure 1: Various forms of Veil (Vyver, 2014)

Many scholars have debated on insufficient role of woman in society due to veil system, but this is only a liberal thinking of some scholars who incorrectly try to convey that following such rules would confined the women the four walls in their house (Khimish, March 2014) which is in contrast to what we learn from the Sunnah and the practice of the companions.

We see various terms being coined for the Islamic dressing of women. This is often based on cultural aspects and the specific interpretations that are prevalent in certain areas. Vyver (2014) points out the various terminologies as follows:

It is imperative to note that the terminology represented by Vyver is not used uniformly across the Muslim world. For example, what is shown as Niqab is called as Burqa in some places. Similarly, what is described as Dupatta in the picture above is considered hijab in other places; whereas the dupatta refers to a piece of cloth (of varying lengths) which Muslim women put on their head and chest. It is also interesting to note the terms such as burqa or dupatta or niqab are not mentioned in the Quran. Niqab, however, is found in the hadith. In the following passages, we will try to interpret the concept of veil in Islam and ponder over the relevant verses of the holy Quran.

THE VERSES OF QURAN THAT DEAL WITH VEIL:

In this section, we have highlighted the verses of Quran that deal with the concept of veil. Specific words used to represent women clothing have been compiled afterward with an explanation of their meaning.

The veil is not only of clothing:

In Surah An-Noor, Allah SWT commands the believing men and women to lower their gazes in order to protect their chastity (Quran 24:30).

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ، ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ

“Say to the believing men that: they should cast down their glances and guard their private parts (by being chaste). This is better for them.”

This is known as “hijab of the eyes”.

In the next verse, Allah commands the Prophet to tell the believing women:

...قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ

“Say to the believing women that: they should cast down their glances and guard their private parts (by being chaste)...”

Wearing the Khumur:

In the verse, 24:31, the women are advised to wear Khumur (or Khimar).

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلَا يَخْبِرْنَ عَلَى جُنُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولَى الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَى عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَخْرُجْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

Likewise enjoin the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty; not to display their beauty and ornaments except what normally appears thereof; let them draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their charms except to their husbands, their

fathers, their fathers-in-law, their own sons, their stepsons, their own brothers, their nephews on either brothers' or sisters' sides, their own womenfolk, their own slaves, male attendants who lack sexual desires or small children who have no carnal knowledge of women. Also, enjoin them not to strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden trinkets. And O believers! Turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, about your past mistakes, so that you may attain salvation.

The word used to represent veil in this verse is Khumur. According to the Arabic lexicons such as Lisan ul Arab, Al-Munjid and others, this word means the head scarf. According to scholars, this word has “no other meaning than a type of cloth which covers the head”. According to some scholars, the women in Madinah used to tie their scarf above their necks which exposed their ears and necks (Maududi, 1972). In this verse, they interpret, the women have been advised to cover their blossoms with their scarfs. This necessitates the use of bigger scarfs, chador (as practiced in some cultures) or other suitable forms of veil.

Some of the liberalists and missionaries try to molest the meaning of this verse by mentioning that women are required to spread the Khumur over their ‘Juyub’ which does not mean the head area. In deference of their this explanation, they mention that the word ‘jaib’ is also used in verses 27:12 and 28:32 in reference to Moses’s miracle of shining hand. This explanation clearly indicates a lack of knowledge about the Arabic language and neglecting the classical meaning of the word khumur. As explained above, the ayah deals with having long khumurs which not only cover the heads but also the juyub. Juyub contains various meanings. Before we discuss the meaning of the word Juyub, let us briefly discuss the concept of multiple meanings for words.

This linguistic aspect, i.e. words having more than one meaning, is not specific to Arabic alone (for example see, “Words with Multiple Meanings”, 2015; and “Homonyms — Words with more than one meaning”, 2011). The scientists point out an interesting fact that the verb *run* alone has 606 different meanings. It’s the largest single entry in the Oxford English Dictionary, placing it ahead of set, at 546 meanings (Winchester, 2011). In almost all languages, homonyms (i.e. the words with multiple meanings exist) and their use depends on the context and situation. The beauty with Quran is that in most cases, the words with multiple meaning represent more than one meaning in accordance with the context of the verses in which they come. This increases the beauty and depth of this glorious book.

After this context, let us now look at the various meanings of the word Juyub. In Arabic, the word Juyub refers to bosoms, breasts or chest, pockets or cavities. It is according to the situation in which they meaning is to be interpreted. It can be seen that in case of the present verse, the more applicable meanings are first and the second.

Another consideration – In one of the ahadiths, it is mentioned that Aisha R.A. used to weep so much whenever she remembered a vow she made earlier that her khimar used to get wet. It shows the possibility that she used to use her khimar to cover her face up. But it cannot be said with surety as it can get wet even if it is not on the face.

It is important to note that the word khimar or khumar can also have multiple meanings depending on the grammatical status in which it is used. It is used in some ahadith in the verb form which stands for covering something (e.g. the hadith which guides men to *cover* nothing above their chins and the hadith in which Abdullah Ibn Umar *covered* the face of his son after he died) In the verb form, it can also refer to the dress item discussed above. Whereas, when it is used in the noun form, in most of the cases, it means the dress item that has been discussed above. And Allah knows best.

In this case, we have seen how because of their lack of knowledge or because of their ill-intentions, an attempt was made to distort the meaning of the Quran. Nowadays, the practice of molesting the meaning of the Quran and the hadith has become widespread among the 'liberal' or the 'progressive' Muslims who wish to interpret the religion according to their own whims and desires, as well as those non-Muslims who wish to lead people astray. To counter this, the Muslims should revert back to acquiring deep knowledge of their religion and join the company of the righteous and the learned.

Wearing the Jilbab:

In the Verse, 33:59, Allah SWT says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِّزَوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَى أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

O Prophet! Enjoin your wives, daughters and the believing women that they should draw their outer garments over their persons. That is more proper, so that they may be recognized and not bothered. Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

The word used here is Jalabeeb which is the plural of Jilbab. Jilbab stands for loose outer garment or cloth. This outer garment can also be stitched to form a loose outer shirt. In some cultures, this condition is tried to be fulfilled while wearing a loose external garment or chaddor on top of the normal dressing (as in case of Burqa in addition to other similar dresses).

The use of word Hijab:

Linguistically, Hijab refers to a barrier or partition. We see the usage of this word in the verses: 7:46, 33:53, 38:32, 41:5, 42:51, 17:45 and 19:17. In all these verses, the word Hijab is used as a form of partition and not as a dress code. We can accordingly say that the Quran does not use the word Hijab to represent the head cover that Muslims refer to as the hijab. However, with this understanding that this word is not used in the Quran as the head scarf, there is no harm in using this word for the head scarf in place of khumur (which is explained earlier and refers to the head scarf). The word hijab is used in a number of ahadith.

CONCLUSION:

The Islamic system puts a great emphasis on chastity and modesty in the society and has prescribed both men and women to lower their gazes. In addition to lowering the gazes, there is a dress code which is prescribed in the book of Allah as well. The verses collated in this article indicate the Quranic injunctions regarding the dress code were not just meant for the wives of the Prophet ﷺ but also the believing

women (i.e. نِسَاءُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ). This falsifies the claim of those who advocate the myth that the Quran does not contain any verses which specifically recommend a dress code for Muslim women. If followed in its true spirit, by both men and women, the system of modesty proposed by Islam can yield the best outcomes and prevent our society from the destruction that it is blindfolded and driven towards. May Allah protect us all and grant us wisdom to follow the path of salvation with our hearts and souls.

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